

remained in the nest until the following morning; so the nestling period was 27 days. They stayed in the area for only 3 or 4 days during which time the young ones were flying freely.

—A. L. MILHINCH, Northam.

Crested Hawks at Mitchell Plateau.—On February 19, 1980, while acting as a guide on a botanical research trip at Mitchell Plateau in the north-west Kimberley (Lat. 14° 47' S., Long. 125° 48' E.) I saw a group of three Crested Hawks (*Aviceda subcristata*). They were 26 km north of the AMAX base camp. The birds were disturbed from a roadside tree (*Eucalyptus nesophila*). They first flew in circles some 20 m above ground level, then two of the birds did the tumbling act peculiar to this species. Time did not allow observation for long and when last seen the birds were still circling above the same group of trees.

This is only the fourth known sighting of the Crested Hawk at the Mitchell Plateau—the present sighting and on two other occasions last “Wet” (November 1978 and February 1979) by myself and once by Mrs. H. B. Gill in July 1973.

—J. A. SMITH, Maylands.

OBITUARY

A. G. MATHEWS, 1907-1978

Arthur Greenwood Mathews, an Honorary Life Member of this Club and son of our third President, Wallace H. Mathews, died suddenly of heart failure at the Royal Perth Hospital on December 14, 1978. He was born at Tammin on January 23, 1907 but spent most of his early youth in South Perth, where his parents came to live. Throughout life he was, like them, a devoted Christian, whose tenets he observed rigidly. However his good-natured tolerance enabled him to gain the friendship of all manner of men and he was universally regarded as a good companion. As a bush naturalist, trained by his father, he was always zealous and competent and his services were often availed of by professional parties.

After leaving school, the Forrest Street State School, he trained as a book-keeper and worked at the United Press Ltd. (R. S. Sampson) and with Flower Davies & Johnson and Mortlocks—in the days when the weekly pay envelope included gold sovereigns. I first met Arthur in 1924 at his parents' home when we were starting the Naturalists' Club; Arthur used to help his father collect the spectacular spoon-winged lacewing, *Chasuopectera hutti*, when it could be taken in numbers, but only for a brief period in December and in a particular South Perth street. See his father's article on the species in the *Western Australian Naturalist*, 1 (2), 1947: 42-44. I was on the literary staff of the United Press then, when Arthur joined us on the commercial side. At the time Arthur's absorbing hobby was not natural history but amateur radio. He communicated with stations overseas. When he was first able to receive the American short wave station at Sehenectady I wrote up his triumph as one of my first literary contributions to *The West Australian!* In later years radio, in one way or another, was always part of Arthur's life.

Ultimately his religious convictions impelled him to forsake commerce for the missionary field. After his marriage with Helen Gwendolyn King he joined the United Aborigines Mission at Badjeling in January 1931. Then he served at Mt. Margaret. There Helen taught at the school and reared two notable Aboriginal children, Ben Mason and May Miller.

In 1933 Arthur and Helen moved on to the Warburton Ranges, which became their principal area of missionary activity. Arthur helped found the Warburton Mission and at the outset actually walked all the way there from Laverton. He served at this mission for several years and

while there learned the local Aboriginal language and acquired a wide knowledge of Aboriginal lore. In March 1938 he was transferred to the mission at Ooldea in South Australia. During his journey from Warburton to take up his new appointment his well-known resourcefulness saved his party, of four adults and two young children (Arthur's small sons) from an unpleasant desert misadventure. The truck broke a floating axle and the party was stranded near the Karbee Terrin rockhole about 200 miles from Laverton. As he was on transfer Arthur had on board his personal effects which included an old home-built small radio transmitter that would work off a car battery, but which he normally never carried. With this inadequate equipment he was dubious of being able to establish contact with the outside world, but he managed it and was able to send out an appeal for assistance—probably the first time in Western Australia that radio was used in a bush rescue. Arthur saw the workings of Providence in this saving of his party from their predicament. Apart from the fortuitous presence in the truck of his little radio transmitter, the Terrin rockhole was only two miles away. But it had been dry for at least six months, until a few days previously a local thunderstorm replenished it with about a thousand gallons of clear rain water. For food the party was sustained by damper baked in the ashes and a continuous supply of Mulga Parrots coming to drink at the rockhole.

Like his contemporary, the late Ivan Carnaby, he was adept at improvisation in emergency. Many tales are told of him of his ingenuity, such as, for instance, using a kangaroo tail's skin as a substitute for a car radiator hose.

At Ooldea the knowledge he was acquiring of Aboriginal customs brought him to the notice of anthropologists and he was visited by Professor T. Harvey Johnston of Adelaide University with whom he continued a correspondence on the subject.

He left Ooldea in 1941 and went to Kalgoorlie as wireless operator for the Flying Doctor Service. In 1942 he enlisted in the 5th Australian L. of C. Signals and was discharged in 1947. He continued work as wireless operator at the aerodrome. I recall that in 1948 when I was engaged on aerial fisheries surveys with the CSIRO I exchanged greetings with Arthur from our chartered Anson plane when flying along the south coast. It was the first time I had contact with him since the days of our youth. After his radio service he worked in Kalgoorlie on insurance and at the mines. Here he also engaged in an enterprise in which he was active for years afterwards—preparing radio scripts for the A.B.C. and giving talks on the air.

He spoke on a variety of topics—on natural history and on Aboriginal lore, capitalising on his days at Warburton and Ooldea. He retained copies of these scripts which are valuable records of first hand observations and interpretations. Some have been challenged by professional anthropologists but as honest opinions of an acute field observer they are interesting nevertheless.

One series of radio interviews, with John Firman, Regional Manager of the A.B.C. at Kalgoorlie, dealt with the meaning of Aboriginal place names. "Kalgoorlie", Arthur explained, was derived from "Kulgoola" (Colgoola), a plant with large edible pear-shaped fruits, known botanically as *Marsdenia australis** and Arthur described how the Aborigines dealt with it. The place name "Kamballic" meant a "hot place." There were other interviews on Aboriginal customs including a series on funerals in the Great Victoria Desert, obtaining water supplies from plants in desert country, camp life of the Aborigines, including an intriguing theory of selective breeding among these desert people. Some of these programmes were broadcast over the State system in the series "W.A. Parade".

In addition to his radio talks Arthur wrote prolifically; for he was fluent with his pen and had an attractive style. His daughter (Mrs. Joyce Spicer) said that her father would write on all sorts of subjects to all kinds

* = *Leichhardtia australis* R.Br.

of people from the Premier to the dustman. A week before he died a letter from him was published in *The West Australian* on pension rises and subsidy cuts—a letter most apt and full of commonsense.

While in Kalgoorlie Arthur's natural history activities were not restricted to radio talks. He was the president of the Eastern Goldfields Naturalists' Club. On his occasional visits to Perth he attended the Club meetings in the W.A. Museum, when they coincided with his visits, and exhibited and spoke on Aboriginal artefacts.

One of his other loves was music. In his mission days he owned and played a small piano accordion and also mastered the gum-leaf. He always played his church organ as long as his children could remember; he played for a church meeting the night before he died. He claimed to have had only one term's tuition and taught himself the rest.

In March 1959 Arthur left Kalgoorlie to become assistant superintendent at the Roelands Native Homes, being concerned with children's care and the management of agricultural work at the homes. Here he remained two years.

He then, after many years, returned to live permanently in Perth, and for a time did insurance work and was employed at the W.A. Government Railways. Here it was that he came to be associated again with the W.A. Naturalists' Club. In 1962 when the Club acquired its hall in Merriwa Street, Nedlands, during the presidency of Len McKenna, Arthur was most active in renovating it for Club purposes. He went into the project with characteristic enthusiasm and energy. He organized the bronze name lettering, "Naturalists' Hall", and its placement over the entrance door. During subsequent meetings, nearly to the time of his death, he acted as general factotum, working the slide projector, arranging the seating accommodation, effecting many repairs, and from time to time delivering lectures to both the senior and junior meetings. When the Club



Fig. 1.—Arthur Mathews ferrying naturalists at Yundurup, October 1974. From left: D. L. Serventy, Arthur Mathews, Philip Bodeker and Geraldine Gregory.

expanded its activities to Yundurup in 1969, during the presidency of Don Reid, Arthur played a notable role in the several excursions organized therewith. His motor boat was always available for ferrying Club parties and individuals to the various delta islands and Peel Inlet.

He became a temporary technical assistant with the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research in Perth between June 1963 and February 1965 and accompanied survey parties to the Canning Stock Route, overland to Alice Springs, and to Fisher Island in Bass Strait on mutton-bird investigations.

After his CSIRO service he became a freelance wildlife collector and field assistant. He was engaged by a Harvard University party under Dr. and Mrs. G. W. Cottrell, the 3rd Harold Hall Expedition of the British Museum to the Gibson Desert in 1965 and by several field expeditions of local naturalists, including those led by Julian Ford and Tom Spence.

He was also active in the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union. He participated in the field camp at Kathleen Valley in 1970 and was a valued assistant to Tom Spence when he hosted the annual dinner meetings of the RAOU at the Perth Zoo. When the RAOU Atlas Scheme was initiated Arthur became involved with several aspects of it, including the transcribing of W. B. Alexander's field notes into the Scheme's data sheets. He took an interest, despite developing ill-health, in the RAOU bird observatory at Eyre and only two days before his death he had brought in a donation of books for the observatory's library.

Arthur left a family of four sons and two daughters, and he was proud of their achievements—in medicine, scholastics and other callings.

Arthur was always an agreeable field companion, his unfailing good humour and generosity, supplementing his competent bushcraft, making an unforgettable impression on those who travelled with him. Despite his inflexible personal code of behaviour he was broadminded enough to tolerate, without arousing embarrassment, the different attitudes of some of his companions. A minor example. When two overseas scientists, who had engaged his services, expressed a wish to include a pre-prandial whisky and gin among the camp stores, Arthur cheerfully acceded to their desires, though he himself was a total abstainer. He never intruded his own strict code of conduct and beliefs to others and respected *their* beliefs and codes.

Two tributes from former field companions may be quoted:

Tom Spence, Director of the Perth Zoological Gardens, relates a telling experience he had with Arthur during a desert trip:

During the May holidays of 1970 (I think it was) my small party joined in an expedition led by Julian Ford across the Gibson Desert westward. This expedition was beset by many misfortunes which included a potentially very dangerous fire in my jeep.

Prior to the major incident, we had several minor spinifex fires when the dry plant material collected in the ill-designed chassis of the Yankee vehicle and was set alight by the heat from the exhaust. Right in the ruddy middle of the Gibson Desert, I guess 500 miles from habitation, we were startled to see smoke billowing from the bonnet of my jeep. We were in difficult soft sand country but I stopped immediately and throwing up the bonnet, was enveloped in pungent smoke. Characteristic of me, I lost hope on the spot, grabbed the radio and ran a hundred metres into the spinifex, calling to the others to bring water and the like. The other Arthur (A. Thorpa) promptly began unloading but Arthur Methews went straight to the front of the vehicle and he immediately observed that the cause of the fire had been the fact that the main electrical lead had chafed on the body, worn away all the insulation and had arced to the chassis and had set alight to the rubber casing of the main lead. His immediate reaction was to seize this main lead with his bare hand, although the hot rubber was bubbling and to saw through it with his bush knife. The fire was then easily put out. I had expected that Arthur Methews' hands would be severely burnt, but his prompt action, or his faith in God, certainly saved him, because he was unscathed!

There we were, helpless, in the wilderness, or so I thought, but Arthur quietly instructed me to go and gather some mallee roots and make some tea. Meanwhile, he rummaged amongst all the rubbish he had secreted in the jeep and produced a soldering bolt, solder, flux and a long length of heavy duty electrical cable. Within half an hour, he had soldered on new terminals on to a jury main lead, we had drunk our tea and we were on our way.

Later on the same journey he proved himself time and time again in a different kind of adversity. We had something like eleven inches of rain in four days

and we were bogged times without number. In one seemingly hopeless incident, Arthur's special intercession resulted in us getting free when we seemed inextricably bogged.

Arthur made a deep impression on several of the predominantly English members of the British Museum expedition of 1965, which he and I accompanied as field collectors. One of them, the ornithologist Derek Goodwin, told me that it meant a great deal to him that Arthur was with the party and there was no one he had met in Australia for whom he had developed warmer feelings. On request he wrote the following tribute:

When Dr. Serventy wrote asking me to write something about the late Arthur Mathews my first thought was to refuse. How could a mere "pommy", who had only known him personally for a couple of months or less, presume to write about someone so pre-eminently Australian as Arthur?

But, on second thoughts, I decided that I did have some qualifications to do so. I met and travelled with Arthur on an expedition in the outback. Expeditions are, as is well known, notorious for bringing disillusionment as to the other members' characters and actions, however discreet and thick a veil is drawn over such matters in their published reports. I can therefore claim to have known Arthur for a revealing period even if a short one. Also I brought to him, as to Australia, the fresh eye of a stranger but an interested and, I hope, observant eye. Just as I was able to appreciate the unsurpassable beauty of such common and often locally unappreciated birds as the Galah and the Eastern Rosella, so I was able to make my appraisals of the Australians I met unaffected by any consideration as to how eminent a position they might or might not hold in the Antipodean ornithological hierarchy.

"Rough diamond". "Someone you'd feel safe to go into the bush with", such clichés come easily to mind and pen but I believe they were true of Arthur. Of many people the Indian proverb: "We see first the jewels in the ceiling, later the filth on the floor", is all too true. It was not true of him. Some people might be, indeed I believe some were, put off by Arthur's blunt and forthright though never, in my experience, discourteous manner. I found him unfailingly helpful, kind and good-hearted. Rich in experience and knowledge he was remarkably open-minded for one of his years (and I write as one who is now within a year or two of the age he was then) and was as happy to accept information as to give it.

Unlike John Donne, I do not feel that every man's death diminishes me but, in a very real if undefinable way, I feel that Arthur's does. I have a colour slide of him, holding in focus for me a branch of flowering *Grevillea* but I do not need to look at the smiling weather-beaten face alongside the golden blossom to remember the golden heart of the man.



Fig. 2.—Arthur Mathews when with the Harold Hall Expedition in 1965.

—Photo by Derek Goodwin.

—D.L.S.